

AN  
ORATION,  
DELIVERED BEFORE THE  
WASHINGTON BENEVOLENT SOCIETY,  
IN THE CITY OF NEW-YORK,  
AT ZION CHURCH,  
ON THE TWENTY-SECOND OF FEBRUARY, 1809.  
—  
BY SAMUEL M. HOPKINS, ESQ.

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY.

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"THERE shall be an annual Oration delivered before the Society, in commemoration of the virtues and services of that great and good Patriot, GEORGE WASHINGTON, on the 22d day of February, each year, being the Anniversary of his Birth-day."

*Constitution of the Society.*

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1809.

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SEYMORE DURST

*t' Fort nieuw Amsterdam op de Manhatans*



FORT NEW AMSTERDAM (NEW YORK), 1651.



When you leave, please leave this book  
Because it has been said  
"Ever'thing comes t' him who waits  
Except a loaned book."

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AT a stated meeting of the "Washington Benevolent Society," held at Harmony-Hall, on the 28th day of February, 1809—the following Resolution was unanimously adopted :

"Resolved, That the President present the thanks of the Society to SAMUEL MILES HOPKINS, Esq. for his eloquent and patriotic Oration (in commemoration of the virtues, talents, and achievements of the illustrious Washington,) delivered in Zion Church, on the 22d inst. and request a copy for publication at the expense of the Society."

Extract from the Minutes,

G. C. VERPLANCK, Secretary.

SEYMORE  
DURST

AN

# ORATION,

&c.

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IT is now nine years since the death of Washington. Upon that event our orphan nation thronged into public assemblies, to deplore the loss of our father and chief. Now we meet to celebrate his fame.

The history of Washington, for more than forty years, was the history of our country. It was the peculiar felicity of this man, to have laid in early youth, the foundation of our national greatness; to have conducted through life the great work of our independence; and when he died, to have left a young empire, wide-extended, united, respected abroad, and happy at home, as the fruit of his labours.

Of such a man, and of such a work, who shall presume to pronounce the eulogium?—This country itself—its independence, liberty, and union, form the fair, and, we hope, the everlasting memorial of his virtues and services. He first taught the infant co-

lonies their strength; he led our armies through the war of independence; he finished the “building of our nation” by his civil administration.

I shall not attempt to detail events which are well known to every American. I presume not to draw a character, to which perhaps no pen has done complete justice. Yet, without arrogance, I may ask your attention to a few of the extraordinary qualities with which providence endowed your hero.

It has been nobly said of Washington, “that his master-passion was the love of country.” He gave to it the best affections of his heart, and the toils and dangers of a long and glorious life. This virtue in him, was mixed with no selfish considerations, no aim at emolument; no motive of personal vanity, or false glory. Its ardour was never cooled by causes which in others would have produced disgust. It was neither limited by local views, nor temporary advantages. His country was America. On one hand it did not embrace the whole world, nor on the other was confined to his native state. No party contest; no state cabals; no lures for popular favour; neither ambition in the field, nor duplicity in the cabinet, “sunk him to the vulgar level of the great.” Patriotism assumed a new and more august character, when exhibited in the life of Washington. He looked not to the present

time only, but to all futurity ; his eye glanced down the descent of ages ; and while he surveyed as far as mortal ken can do, the present and the future, his hopes and affections were fixed on that great whole, which is embraced in the history of an empire.

Among the virtues of Washington, none perhaps was more remarkable than his fortitude. But in naming this, I do not descend to speak of personal courage, nor even of military ardour and enterprise. To meet with naked breast the weapons of war—to rush on death in the field of battle ;—most men can do this ; it is no uncommon praise. The conduct of the war required virtues of a very different order. View your General supported by the slender resources of this young country, advancing to assert its independence. He intrepidly takes the field, and waits the foe with a few undisciplined and ill-provided troops. But Britain is upon thee, Washington, with all her force ; with her thousand ships and veteran armies. Undismayed at the invader's power, he maintains the conflict. Sometimes he is compelled to a reluctant retreat ; sometimes forced to hazard his country and his fame (for he thought not of life) in unequal combat. At length the states are exhausted ; the people desponding ; his brave soldiers sinking around him with sufferings and want. In the midst of these accumulating difficulties, he is unpalled and serene ; unbroken by adverse fortune,

he calmly surveys the portentous scene, and smothers in his own great bosom cares dangerous to utter, or too mighty for utterance. View this in the character of Washington, and contemplate an example of fortitude which has never been exceeded.

It has been said by moralists, that it is more easy to bear bad fortune with equanimity than good. Perhaps temperance is a virtue more rare than fortitude ; and it is certain that great prosperity will often intoxicate the man whom adversity could not depress. What then must have been the emotions of Washington, when at length he turned the tide of war and repelled the invader ; and from the midst of surrounding and impending dangers led us safe and triumphant to peace and independence ? He retired from the command of armies to the cultivation of his farm, followed by the benedictions of grateful millions. The literary world was filled with his praise. Kings and conquerors hastened to present tributes of respect to the farmer of Mount-Vernon. Again he was called from retirement by the acclamations of a nation, to direct the administration of the government he had formed. Placed in this high station by the unanimous suffrage of his own country, and admired by the most distant civilized nations ; a lot more flattering to human pride never fell to man. But did Washington betray a weakness ?—No effusion of vanity or joy ; neither arrogance nor pride

affected the steady grandeur of his mind. Such was his self command that he bore the weight of success, of universal admiration and unrivalled fame, as he bore the prospect of defeat and ruin. From his own high sphere he could look down upon adversity—and upon glory also.

To such qualities were joined an enlightened understanding, a penetrating and profound judgment, and consummate prudence. He distinguished with peculiar sagacity the true from the false; the specious from the solid; the agreeable from the useful; the illusions of theory, from the demonstrations of experience. Having no vanity to gratify, he never staked either the dignity of government, or the public interest upon the issue of new projects. His object was not only the utmost possible good, but the greatest certainty of obtaining it. The success of his country, and her unrivalled prosperity, till his principles were abandoned, form a magnificent commentary upon the value of such qualities, in a General and a Statesman.

Nor were any of the great endowments of his soul more conspicuous than his justice and probity of character. In the ordinary scenes of life, this is no uncommon virtue. But in the conduct of governments, there are occasions where to be just, implies that magnanimity, that noble and elevated

impartiality which gave such a cast of grandeur to the character of Washington. He was superior to resentment and revenge, and the spirit of persecution. The collisions of political sects could never reach him. Still less could he be made the partizan of one foreign nation, or retain personal hatred to another. He had no enemies but the enemies of the republic; no political attachments but to his country.

Such were some of the virtues which centered in a form not unworthy of them. God gave to this favoured instrument the visible ensigns of authority. He had a dignity of person, a natural majesty of deportment and mien, which, while they inspired confidence and affection, taught mankind that he was made to guide, to command, and to save.

A man who possesses any distinguished virtue is an ornament to the world. He who possesses many such virtues, and throughout a long life devotes himself to the practice of them, is among the rarest gifts of Heaven. Yet there have been such men, who were also stained by signal defects or vices. What then shall be said of one, who, uniting in himself this assemblage of great and good qualities, passed a life in scenes of unparalleled trial and difficulty, and finished that life scarcely tarnished by a foible?

Had he been only a brave General, our cause would have been jeopardized, and, perhaps, lost in unequal battle; and yet, without his qualities as a military chief, we should not have succeeded. As a mere Statesman, he could never have obtained the ascendancy which times required. Had he wanted fortitude, or prudence, or self-command, or that consummate impartiality and integrity of character, which inspired universal confidence, we should have been a conquered or a divided people. Had he been venal or ambitious, where had been our liberty? It was only that wonderful assemblage of qualities, which made a character at once great and faultless, that could exclude all competition, unite all hearts, and combine all efforts in one common cause.

Yet, great and good as he was, his qualities were so peculiar as to be almost singly adapted to the circumstances in which he lived. Without America, he might not have appeared great: America without him, might not have been an independent nation.

Too elevated for courts; too honest for a courtier; too independent to be the instrument of power; too humane for a military destroyer; he was adapted and given to the wants of his country, at the precise

epoch, when all his useful and great qualities were necessary for her preservation.

Let those who believe and trust in providence; those who doubt not but the events of time are accomplished according to some fixed design, and tend to certain and eventual good; let such remember how Washington was formed for his country's salvation, and then cease to despair of her future happiness.

Among the ancients, no honours were too great for the man who, in any one instance, saved the state. The names of a few who more than once preserved their country, have been transmitted to all posterity with increasing honours. But history furnishes no other example of a man like Washington, on whose conduct or decision the fate of a nation was so often suspended. Almost every period of the war was full of those delicate conjunctures, in which it was dangerous not to act, and where a single error might have ruined the country. At Trenton, Princeton, Monmouth, and Yorktown, his consummate military conduct turned and decided the fortune of the war.

He saved his country by his aid, in forming her constitution, and still more by the authority of his opinion in favour of that form of government. By his civil administration, he saved the constitution,

and with it the union. In a most illustrious example of wisdom and firmness in the cabinet, he saved us from French domination.

France, under all her forms of despotism—royal, constitutional, jacobinic, directorial, consular, imperial ;—France still nourished her destructive ambition. But that passion became peculiarly dangerous to the liberties of mankind in the progress of her revolution.

Very soon after our government was organized, appeared on earth the revolutionary demon of France. His birth shook and terrified the nations. His young efforts covered one country with sorrow and blood, and threatened ruin to surrounding states. Cities are sacked, countries laid desolate; the youth of Europe are driven, bound, to the field, to waste each others blood; nations are filled with the cries of aged parents, defenceless women, suffering infants. At the distance of twenty years we behold him growing stronger and more cruel: dangerous to enemies, fatal to friends. Still unsatisfied with tears and blood, he advances over prostrate Europe. He breaks with scorn, barriers hitherto impregnable. He tramples with iron feet upon laws and liberty, and social institutions. Force and fraud, oaths and bribes, fraternity, assassination and poison, are equally his instruments.

Such and so terrible was the power which began its career by a professed opposition to kingly government. But not to enumerate hostile monarchies invaded, nor friendly kingdoms overthrown, where are the republics of Europe? Where are Switzerland, Genoa, Venice, and Holland? Where had been America, but for Washington?

An embassy came from France, with secret instructions to involve us in the war; with public professions that she did not wish us to take part in it. The enthusiasm in favour of her cause was universal. Every sentiment, every honest sentiment of an American heart, favoured a people who appeared to be contending for their liberties. We heard, enchanted, the syren song of equal rights; of just governments, founded on the public will, and to be administered for the general good. We kindled with indignation when told of armies slaughtered, and countries laid waste, to gratify the ambition of kings. We glowed with enthusiasm, when we learned that a great nation had broken the yoke of despotic authority, and willed to be free. We called for arms to support her cause. Blind and deluded, we were rushing into the abyss of French fraternity.

Now, for the first time, was the father of his country to oppose the wishes of his people. The inces-

sant cares of his life had hitherto been soothed by the public sympathy. He had often before hazarded his fame upon the chance of events. Now he was to meet the attacks of malignant calumny.

But what could the wiles of foreign intrigue; what could envy, or disappointed ambition, or the low calculations of venal patriotism; what impression could these make upon the colossal and adamantine column of his fame? He had triumphed over calamity; he had risen superior to ambition; now he soared above detraction.

He met and repelled the machinations of France. He proclaimed and preserved our neutrality.—Young and feeble as we were, encompassed by difficulties without, and distressed by internal faction, still Washington was at our head, and France never dared to tell him "*that she would have no neutrals.*" Under another sage and patriot the same policy governed our councils and preserved our prosperity. In the venerable repose of age, Washington again consented to assume arms for our protection: but his name alone was a shield to the country.

To those who but imperfectly remember the situation of our country twenty years ago, it will be impossible to describe with justice the benefits of the

civil administration of Washington. My audience will not easily realize the contrast between the years 1788 and 1797; nor well comprise in one view the mass of external and domestic difficulties which were surmounted, and of benefits secured.

Imagine, however, that we were without a government: no revenue nor force: neither trade nor manufactures. Private distress and poverty were universal: taxes heavy: credit and confidence gone: civil war impending. Indian hostilities distressed the frontiers: our citizens enslaved in Algerine captivity. England first menacing our frontiers, next attacking our commerce on the ocean: France assailing the independence of our government, and alluring our people to join in her flagitious conspiracy against liberty, laws, and society. The claims of Spain upon the Mississippi distracted the western country, and endangered the union. At home and abroad there was but one prospect of distress and ruin at the beginning, and afterwards of danger and embarrassment in the public affairs.

The reverse of this picture you better know. Under the auspices of Washington, aided by Hamilton's reforming genius, and by that of other distinguished men in the cabinet, an abundant revenue was provided; public credit was established, and

private confidence followed. Honest industry took courage, for hope redoubled its efforts and an ample reward crowned its labours. We became prosperous and happy.

When England assailed our commerce, we made an actual, not a pretended preparation for defence ; but we negotiated with candour. And Jay, a statesman illustrious for talents, integrity, and public services, concluded a treaty, not more remarkable for the malignity with which it was assailed by faction, than for the undivided opinion now entertained of its signal benefits.

Ample reparation was obtained from Britain ; the Mississippi opened ; the union strengthened ; the Indians subdued : our brethren returned from eastern captivity to their native soil with songs of joy : we reposed in peace and glory. When Washington left the earth, he left America with a name then unpolluted ; a name beloved and revered among allied nations, and held illustrious throughout the world. When he had accomplished the most glorious of all destinies, it was the last felicity of his fortune, that he lived not to see his works tarnished by a successor. Happy fate !—Happy country ! if she would follow his counsels, or know the worth of his example.

It is scarcely possible to avoid looking into futurity to ask what is to be the issue of an example so perfect, exhibited on so great a theatre of action. The country for which Washington fought and toiled, is our country ; here we shall leave our children to do and suffer whatever may be the will of Heaven. Is an empire commenced under such auspices to exhibit the same scenes of treachery and faction, violence and blood, which others have done ? Or shall the bright example, and the precepts of our chief, introduce a new æra in the affairs of men and lead to happier times ? We must confess that political history exhibits for the most part, but a melancholy spectacle. Faction will sometimes reign with intemperate sway. Political persecution may be reduced to system. The government itself may become the degraded instrument of a party, or be unhinged by the experiments of moon-struck statesmen. At some disgraceful moment it may be at once the subservient agent of a foreign despot, and the ignoble object of his insult and contumely.

If then it is decreed that this union shall be dissolved ; our strength annihilated ; our independence, and with it our liberty, lost ; that this great edifice of free government shall crumble and fall, when no longer supported by the hand of Washington ; how magnificently great, how awful hereafter, will appear the

ruins of such an empire and of its liberty—the ruins of an empire which he reared; the ruins of liberty which could not survive him.

But no! for in all former times, and in circumstances of much greater danger, has a protecting and saving spirit interferred for the preservation of our country. It has been our peculiar character to gather strength from adversity, and after every fall to rise with renewed and augmented vigour.

“ Fond impious Man! think’st thou yon sanguine cloud,  
     “ Rais’d by thy breath, has quench’d the orb of day?  
     “ To morrow he repairs the golden flood,  
     “ And warms the nations with redoubled ray.”

We who are here, occupy that middle space in time which connects the cotemporaries of Washington with their successors. We begin, as to him, the age of history. Hence, my brethren of the Washington Benevolent Society, we have sought to establish an institution, in which a perpetual succession of men should preserve the memory of our hero, and hold up his example for imitation and instruction to each passing age. Be it ours to give an admiring posterity a just conception of what he was; to show them we are not wholly ungrateful, and to consecrate to fame and to glory a day which hereafter will be distinguished in the annals of the benefactors of mankind.

Another duty also claims our attention. We have seen that some who passed their youth in the field with Washington, pass their age in misery. Sometimes we see the wreck of an American soldier ; he whose heart once beat high with the love of liberty and the hope of fame ; he who, proud of the array of splendid war, marched in the front and panted for the conflict ; he who braved the battle and the storm, the summer's heat and the winter's frost ; all ardour and emulation in the public cause : see him now broken with misfortune, bowed down with grief, despoiled of the sword and the plume of war, and forgetful of the pride of victory : see him feeble and desponding, perhaps asking a pittance from a country which he so honourably defended ; and like Washington, ready to breathe his last sighs in prayers for her safety. Can we, who enjoy the fruit of his toils, be indifferent to his sufferings ? To you, my brethren of the Washington Benevolent Society, the appeal was not made in vain ; you provided relief for the war-worn veteran ; you lighted up a smile on the brow of despondency ; you have bestowed a blessing upon the last hours of him, whose youth was spent in procuring blessings for you.

The age of the cotemporaries of our hero is rapidly passing away. The next generation will search with wonder and delight into history, for scenes which many of us have personally witnessed. Succeeding

ages, as they roll on, will more and more develope the importance of the present. This broad continent will one day be covered with populous cities and civilized inhabitants ; navies will float upon the Mississippi and the lakes ; neighbouring empires will speak the same language, and recognize a common origin and kindred institutions. These they will trace back to our age, and to Washington, the founder of our policy. The character of nations has at all times been influenced by that of their founders. See Rome, fired by a public ambition to subdue and sway the world, a passion derived from the personal character of a few men ; for ages together see her exalting her early heroes in history and song ; and, citing the examples of her fathers, see her assume the high prerogative to humble the pride of every other power, and give laws to kings and dependent nations.

Yours, Americans, be a different character : here, let justice and temperate liberty reign, and the proud unconquerable spirit of independence, alike unwilling to invade the rights of others, incapable of yielding your own ; reluctant to assume arms ; resolved never to lay them down till your rights are vindicated : preferring justice to violence—liberty to peace—death and ruin to slavery, or the loss of honour. Such was the mind of Washington ; such, Americans, be the maxims of your republic.

How vast is the space which the character of this

man is destined to fill. Rising up in a polished age, and under the light of science and religion, his example will be imitated on a much broader field than that of the Grecian legislators or Roman fathers. Nations yet unborn, senates in future ages, when they ponder the fate of those nations, and seek in antiquity for examples of illustrious deeds in the field or cabinet, will point almost with adoration to the revered precedents of his actions, and exclaim, “*thus did Washington!*”

Yes! our empire and our freedom shall survive. Guided, great Washington, by thy example, and warned by thy precepts, we shall learn to extend the reign of peace and liberty ; to consolidate the union; to repel with scorn the attacks of foreign and domestic faction, and in the prosperity and glory of our country, to raise a firm and everlasting monument to thy fame.

When the traveller therefore in ages to come, shall inquire for the monument of Washington, the answer will be, “ behold the empire which he founded.” What other can we raise? Shall perishable marble; shall columns of brass; shall Pantheons, or triumphal arches, affect to add to the durability of his fame? Presumptuous piles of dust! His example shall stand a light and a consolation to man, when statues, and monuments, and arches, and temples, shall have crumbled into ruins.